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The Benjamin Vocal Method

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VOCAL METHOD

BY

William Augustus Benjamin

Price One Dollar

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Preface

AFTER having read Mr. Benjamin's remarks upon singing, and having carefully sung each one of his Progressive Vocalizes myself, I have no hesitation in saying that the Vocal Method here set forth is admirable, and—given good material upon which to work—should, with conscientious study, be productive of excellent results. It is absolutely essential, however, that individual voices be individually trained in order to overcome faults, or to improve good qualities.

In singing, as in every other art, whether of peace or of war, everything depends upon the "man behind the gun"; the pupil is, as it were, the gun; the master is the man who trains it; the execution that the gun so trained preforms, must, under proper guidance, be effective.

It almost seems that less common sense is exercised by would-be singers (and those of their families who are enthusiastic about them) than by persons who are preparing for other walks of life; they think that nothing but voice is necessary, and are usually oblivious to the fact that in this branch of art more care is needed than in any other, not only in the actual schooling of the vocal organs, but of the mind as well and of the body as a whole, in order that strength may be acquired to withstand the great strain of a busy professional life.

The possession of a fine voice is as frequent among the uneducated as among the educated classes of society; and it follows that, as the former are much more numerous, corresponding care should be taken in the all-round mental training of the average pupil.

At this time, when general education and particular regard for the English language is at such a low ebb in America, I cannot too seriously impress upon all singers the absolute necessity of culture, of refinement of mind and body, of demeanor, and of diction.

In the following material Mr. Benjamin has covered these points excellently and it gives me pleasure to endorse his views.

DAVID BISPHAM

New York, October 18th. 1912.

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The Benjamin Vocal Method

FOREWORD

WHY is it that today we have so few singers with the great power, wonderfully brilliant execution and heart-swaying sympathy that made Giovanni Rubini, Maria Malibran, Giulia Grisi, Jenny Lind, Mario, Francisco Tamagno, Adelina Patti, Henriette Sontag, Christine Nilsson and a score of others world-famous only a few decades ago? Because we are unwilling to follow the proper course of training sufficiently long to reach their degree of perfection.

In this age of hurry and commercialism the majority of young people expect to be able to sing more or less difficult songs before they rightly understand how to produce one-half the vowels in simple vocalization and with few exceptions the singers of today know very little about breath-control which is the *real foundation* of all good singing.*

Rossini once said that the great essential for the singer is "voice." Quite true, but to make proper use of that voice the singer *must have absolute breath-control.*

One may have a perfectly formed larynx, highly-arched palate and wide throat, capable of giving tremendous resonance and yet get but imperfect results in singing because of the lack of proper method in breathing.

ON BREATHING

There are two kinds of breathing; the inadequate half-breath practised by the majority, and the *deep* breathing enjoyed by the few.

Deep breathing is not difficult, in fact, it *should* be the easier way, and they whose careless habits have drifted them out of the robust, full-lunged breathing of vigorous childhood lay themselves open to lung weakness that may materially shorten their lives.

Leaving singing entirely out of our consideration, vigorous, deep, full-lunged breathing is vastly more essential to our general health than the food-stuffs we take into our stomachs.

Without the oxygen contained in the air we would die in less than three minutes, for the combustions constantly going on within us would smother out life as quickly as a lamp-flame goes out when the air-vents are clogged.

*"When the anatomy and physiology of the larynx are considered, it will be seen that the muscular mechanisms concerned in voice-production are of a delicacy unequaled anywhere in the body except possibly in the eye and the ear. And when it is further considered that these elaborate and sensitive mechanisms of the larynx are of little use except when *adequately* put into action by the *breath-stream*, which again involves hosts of other muscular movements, and the whole in relation to the parts of the vocal apparatus above the larynx, the mouth, nose, etc., it becomes clear that only long, patient, and intelligent study will lead to the highest results."—Mills on "Voice Production"

It is not my intention to go into a physiological treatise; I simply wish to impress upon my readers and pupils the great importance of breathing right and to tell them how to do it.

The breathing organs comprise the mouth, nose, larynx, trachea, bronchial tubes and the air-cells of the lungs, which must be kept clear for easy respiration. Overexertion, sudden transitions from heat to cold, draughts, or *any condition liable to cause congestion should be most carefully avoided.* The air enters the trachea through a small opening in the larynx wherein are located the vocal-cords. The lower extension of the trachea branches into small air tubes called "Bronchial tubes," much like the fibrous roots of a plant and connect with the various air-cells of the lungs. These air-cells are formed of membranous tissue which, in a healthy condition, are highly elastic and capable of being extended to a very considerable degree.

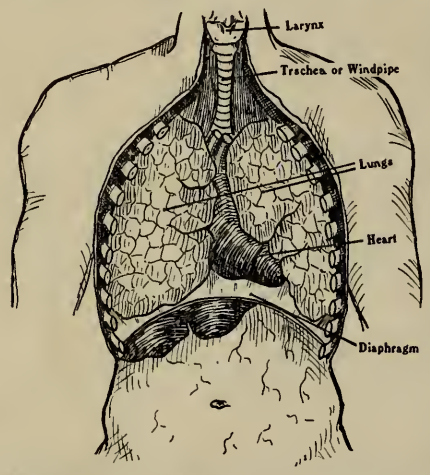


Plate A. Shows the trachea (wind-pipe), lungs and diaphragm. Immediately below the diaphragm lie the stomach, liver and other important organs of the body, which is a significant fact for the singer to note. It is evident that absolute freedom in breathing is impossible with a congested stomach.

The lungs are covered with a similar membrane, which envelopes them and acts as a protection against frictional irritation, the inner walls of the chest being also lined with the same covering.

The upper part of the body is a cage-like affair of bone and muscle, of sufficient pliability to admit of great expansion; in this cage the lungs fit closely to the inner walls, between the chest and the abdomen, supported by the sinuous "midriff" or diaphragm which divides the upper and lower parts of the body.

The diaphragm is a membrane of stout fibrous composition,---a sort of sheet muscle extending across the middle of the body as shown in the illustrations, being attached to the spinal column in the back, to the lower ribs around on the inside and shaped upward toward the center in convex form.

Upon each intake of air into the lungs the diaphragm is contracted or pushed down to a greater or less extent according to the depth of breathing. In very deep breathing the muscle is considerably contracted and causes an indrawing of the lower ribs and abdomen. (See illustration "B.")

Now as absolute breath-control is the very foundation of all good singing, it is necessary that the whole breathing apparatus be capable of great endurance; this can only be attained by regularly exercising those muscles that are brought into play to accomplish this result: these muscles are chest, diaphragm and abdominal.

Inspiration is comparatively an easy process. It is the out-flow of breath (ex-

piration) with which we have to deal. Breath-control being conservation, power and steadiness of the out-going breath-stream, the need of strength to uphold a given tone *true and steady*, for any considerable time from the instant of attack to its finish, with the same tonal quality and proper expression throughout, is absolutely necessary.

We are told by those who are supposed to know that we should always breathe through the nose, which in ordinary respiration is the right thing to do, and it is best also to breathe that way at the start in taking regular breathing lessons; but in singing we must resort to mouth breathing for the reason that we are unable to take an instantaneous full breath through the nose without great effort and a disagreeable snuffling sound.

The pupil will now take up the exercise that is to accomplish the desired result.

Standing easily, head erect, with the arms dropped closely to the sides and muscles relaxed, take in a slow *comfortably* full breath through the nose, at the same time allowing the muscles of the upper torso* to expand (push out) and the abdominal muscles to slightly contract (draw in). Hold the breath for four seconds or pulse-beats, counting the while one—two—three—four—with each second; then carefully exhale, *smoothly*, *evenly*, *slowly*, allowing the muscles to slowly relax as the breath-stream goes out, always bearing in mind that the important part of breathing is to absolutely control the *expiring* breath and to have plenty of it to control.

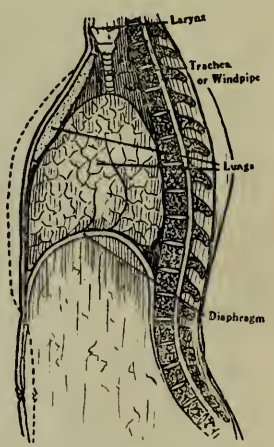


Plate B. The shaded lines show position in normal breathing. The dotted line in deep breathing shows the expansion of the muscles of the upper torso, affording plenty of air space, and at the same time the contraction of the abdominal muscles, which form a strong support to the diaphragm.

This exercise may be found very tiresome at the beginning and *care must be taken not to overdo it.* Never carry the work to the point of fatigue. In the beginning the student may be able to work at it three, four, perhaps even five minutes, but day by day, if practiced regularly, the muscles gain strength and the lung-cage expands so that in a very little while one may breathe easily and regularly in this manner and wonder why he did not always breathe so.

*The muscles of the upper torso apply not only to the chest muscles but also to those of the sides and back and after a few weeks faithful practice the pupil will find that the whole upper part of the body expands upon the intake of a comfortably full breath.

THE SINGING VOICE

SINGING is produced by the out-going breath, which plays upon the vocal cords, causing them to vibrate in such manner as to give similar motion or vibration in the cavities above the larynx. *All out-going breath that does not produce tone is lost.*

The vocal cords have very little to do with the actual quality of the tones, the articulative and resonance mechanism being above the larynx; *i. e.* mouth, nasal passages, etc., and the final results as to sound depend upon them. This being a fact the tone quality depends, of course, upon the proper shaping of these organs in the utterance of any given vowel or word.

Regardless of the fact that these organs are much in use every day many singers and speakers have never given them a physiological study. I therefore recommend that the reader give especial attention to illustration "C".

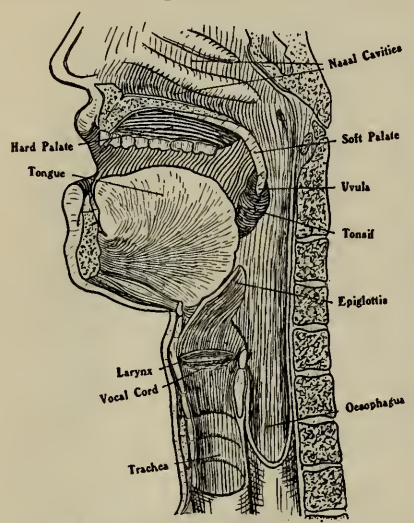


Plate C. Half-section view of the vocal apparatus, showing the large resonance cavities of the mouth and nose. Equable or nasal poise is produced by the accurate division of the breath-stream through these cavities, which is accomplished by the proper position of the tongue and soft palate. The illustration shows the position of the parts in sounding the vowel a.

The resonance chambers comprise the whole mouth and nasal cavities, but more particularly the teeth, gums, hard palate and the bony structure of the nose, which, like the body of the violin, give the resonance, intensification and "carrying" power, while the movable parts, lips, tongue, soft palate and nostrils give quality to the tone.

The soft palate is an extremely flexible muscle which divides the mouth from the back-nostrils and throat and can be raised to a degree that will produce a purely "open" tone or lowered to meet the tongue so closely that the tone is thrown upward through the nose, producing an extremely unpleasant nasal quality or "twang". To avoid the blatant "open" quality we "*cover*" the tone, *i. e.* in vocalizing the tongue is slightly raised in the back and the soft palate drops down to a greater or less extent according to the requirement of the articulation and quality of tone produced,* but if the tongue be much thickened in the back or pulled back toward the throat it produces a muffled or "throaty" tone, frequently noticed in trombone and cornet players when they attempt to sing, their tongues through occupation habit being thickened by muscular pressure against the mouthpieces of their instruments.

*A few teachers advise against the "covered" tone and teach the "open" tone placement. For more than twenty-five years I have made a close study of the methods of the greatest singers and teachers of our time and my observation of pupils who have studied under the open tone method convinces me that such process hardens the tone, gives a blatant quality and results in the ruin of the voice in a very few years.

Right singing is an art. It requires more than well developed vocal organs to make an artistic singer, although singing, of itself, should be *natural* and *easy*. The tone should float out on the breath with no more effort than the spoken word and were it not for abnormal conditions, careless habits, or the straining of the vocal apparatus beyond the power of endurance the vocal teacher would have an easy task. To avoid what is known as the "throaty" tone we must have equable poise, "nasal poise" some teachers call it; *i. e.* the flow of breath carrying the tone must pass through the resonance chambers, the soft palate and tongue being so shaped that we get an equable division of the nose and mouth cavities, thereby producing a tone that is full, round, resonant and beautifully expressive. This is to sing as nature intended we should sing and gives us the *bel canto** method of the old Italian school.

The successful training of the voice depends entirely upon the thoroughness and authority of the teacher's own training, his practical experience as a singer and his ability to impart his knowledge to the pupil, as well as the pupil's intelligence and aptitude in receiving instruction.

I believe that no other field of educational training is so crowded with charlatans as that of "vocal culture" and it truly is a serious condition. There should be rigid examination of singing teachers by a board of experts under state supervision and the teacher should be licensed, upon successfully passing such examination, the same as a medical practitioner, for present conditions permit of the absolute ruin of the singing apparatus of many bright young students who, under proper training, would probably develop into fine singers.†

After proper breathing comes the proper development of the tone quality and this is not so easy to generalize upon, for the reason that each pupil should be trained separately—and frequently by different processes, although the same method and results be always kept in mind in each case.

Let us now take up as briefly as possible, but comprehensively, the subject of vocalizing and voice building (tone-placement, etc.). The singing voice is divided into three registers, although in some cases in the female voice there have been found as many as six. Behnke claimed that in men there were but two, the "thick" and the "thin" and in women three,—the "thick", the "thin" and the "small", but the writer has frequently observed three distinct registers in the male voice, the lower or "chest" register, the middle register and the head register, and in the female voice three or more. We must always keep in mind the fact that each register is a series of tones that are characteristically different, the one from the other, and in some singers this difference is surprisingly marked.

I have had pupils whose lower registers were heavy chest baritone, the

*_Bel canto_ Beautiful singing

†Be careful in the selection of your teacher

middle register beautiful, round, full of "color" and the upper or head tones almost all "falsetto", thin, colorless and without resonance.

As set forth in the beginning, all persons should be able to sing, although there are many who do not. With some the condition is purely psychological,—they could sing if they thought so, or rather, they could sing if they did not think they could not.

For those who really cannot sing there are good and sufficient reasons: malformation or chronic congestion of the vocal organs, adenoids, thickened tongue, conditions brought on during the adolescent period, straining of vocal cords in childhood and a multitude of other things, any one tending to greatly and in some instances to permanently injure the singing apparatus, causing conditions that only a teacher of wide experience can correct or remedy.

Tone placement in such cases is naturally more difficult than with the clean, healthy throat, in which nature has originally "placed" the tone as it should be placed and the most beautiful tones that can be produced by any singer are those that come as naturally as the speaking voice, rich, smooth, entrancing—*just breathed out through the resonance chambers with the least possible effort.* There is, in the untrained voice that has been carelessly used, an abrupt "break" between the registers which is more or less marked, according to the strain the voice has been subjected to under incorrect method, abuse, or neglect; still in nearly every instance there will remain "spots" in the compass wherein the tone quality is almost faultless.

It is *always* advisable to study voice under the direction of a competent teacher, but for the benefit of those to whom such a course is impossible I suggest that the student take a range of about one and one-half octaves, *easily within his compass* and sing the simple scale as shown in No. 1 of the Vocalizes, on the vowel "O" or "Ah" whichever seems better, finding that place in his range wherein the tones come free and beautiful, with no marked nasal intonation and with absolute relaxation of all the muscles of the face, mouth and throat; as the stiffened jaw, set expression of the face and contracted throat muscles are at once the evidence of faulty production. To guard against any tenseness of expression or muscular contraction it is well to vocalize before a mirror and note from the expression of the face if there be any tension whatsoever. If one finds a tendency to set the muscles then allow a faint smile to creep into the expression*, which will help materially in relaxation.

When the student has satisfied himself as to certain tones in his (or her) register being correct, let him take those tones as his guide, study the position of the throat muscles and formation of the mouth as he sings them and work

*Marchesi is opposed to the smile as an aid in relaxation, claiming that it becomes stereotyped and causes the very condition it is supposed to help avoid, but I have found a slight smiling expression very beneficial with my pupils,——I mean, of course, just the suggestion of an easy, pleasant smile, *not a grin.*

to produce all the other tones of the entire compass the same way, preserving the same quality until gradually the so-called "breaks" dissapear, there being apparently but one register throughout, and the whole compass is of one beautiful, soft, resonant quality, full of expression and sweetness of tone. *This is tone placement.*

THE VOCALIZES

It is my intention to cover the more advanced work of the student, together with more difficult vocalizes, in later books; but in order that my present readers and pupils may the better benefit by a larger scope of practice I will follow these articles or "lessons" with twenty-four vocalizes, of sufficient variety and so graded as to cover years of close conscientious work; in fact, numbers 1, 2, 3, 6, 10 and 23 should be a part of the student's daily work for a long time; if he be a professional singer he should use them as long as he lives or has a voice to sing.*

In the study of any recitative, song or aria, it will be found that four methods will cover the ground, *viz:* 1. The sustained single tone; 2. The smooth *legato* cadenza; 3. The distinct *marcato* run of the scale, and 4. The *staccato* passage. As these methods are all of the utmost importance it will be necessary for the student to work upon them as much as possible. The climax or finish of nearly all vocal compositions are sustained and require breath in proportion to their length; the student should therefore work diligently to acquire steadiness, resonance and sweetness of tone, as well as power, on every note in his compass, with the least possible loss of breath.

Beginning with No. 1. sing the scale slowly, smoothly, in moderate time, counting *one-two* and *three-four* to each measure, up and down the scale many times, increasing the tempo gradually until the run back and forth is made with great rapidity,—*BUT—softly and smoothly, with sure attack and definite stroke of the glottis on every note.*†

With this same exercise take up the moderate tempo again, counting *one-two* and *three-four* to each measure as before, attacking each tone with clean-cut precision and dropping it almost instantly just as cleanly finished as begun; *i. e.* as you count "one" sing "Do", giving it about one-eighth value, or one-half the value of your first beat, the last half of this beat and all of the second beat being silent. On the beginning of the third beat sing "Re", the last half of the

*Great singers like Sembrich, Nordica, Melba, Slezak, Bispham, Scotti and others use these or similar exercises constantly in their practice work, vocalizing from two to six hours a day year after year, so it should not seem a great task when your teacher demands of you only an hour or two of conscientious work each day.

† Through extreme nervousness or lack of breath control some singers show a decided *vibrato* or "tremolo" which is extremely unpleasant and should be eliminated as quickly as possible. Where the vibrato is caused by disease of the vocal organs the student should consult a throat specialist.

third beat and all of the fourth beat being silent and so on, up and down the scale, carefully, precisely, with clean enunciation and absolute relaxation.

The "staccato" passages are sung by uttering each syllable quickly, with an almost imperceptible expulsion of breath, *wasting none*, but making every bit of it count in tone production. This exercise is taken up a little quicker than the others, not too fast at the start, but gradually increasing until the run can be made with great ease and rapidity. This is a difficult exercise but one of the most effective in the whole series.

Number 8 is of especial value in "tone-placement", as the "registers" can be smoothed out much more easily by working *from the top down.*

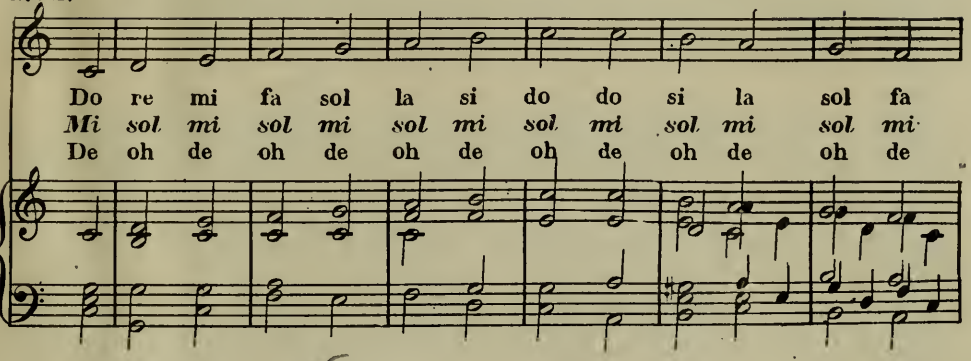
The other vocalizes are to be sung as they are written, always keeping in mind conservation of breath, ease of tone production, enunciation, rythm and absolute relaxation of the entire vocal apparatus.

As previously stated, however, it is much better to study under the direction of a competent teacher, for no one can *hear his own voice as it is* and there are sometimes faults which only an experienced teacher can remedy; in some instances recourse to a throat specialist is necessary. Such faults the student will find it impossible to overcome alone.

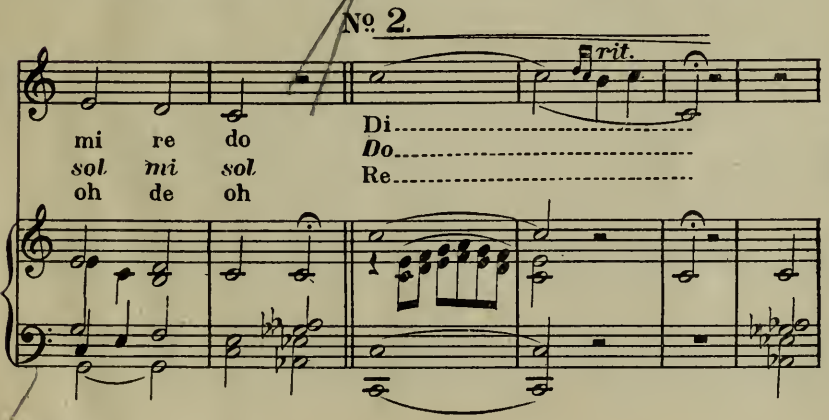
One more point and I have finished: the singer, more perhaps than any other person in public life, should take the very best care of his general health.

TWENTY-FOUR PROGRESSIVE VOCALIZES

No. 1.

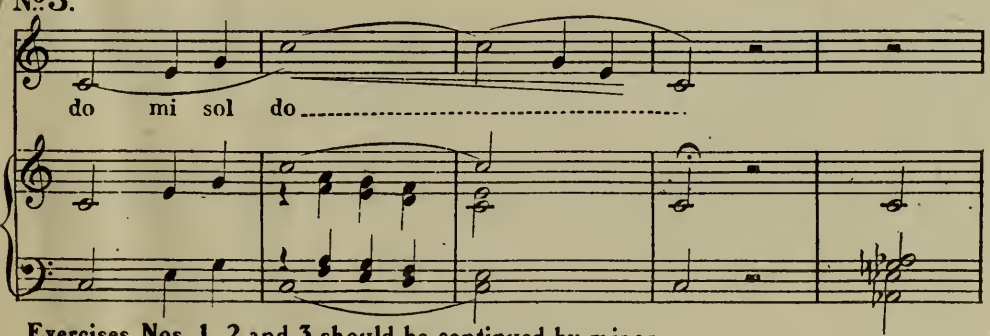


No. 2.



This exercise (No. 2) should be sung slowly, holding the tone firm and connected throughout.

No. 3.



Exercises Nos. 1, 2 and 3 should be continued by minor seconds as far as the pupil can sing with ease.

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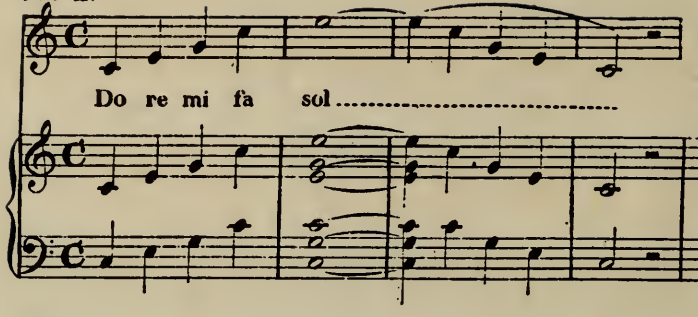
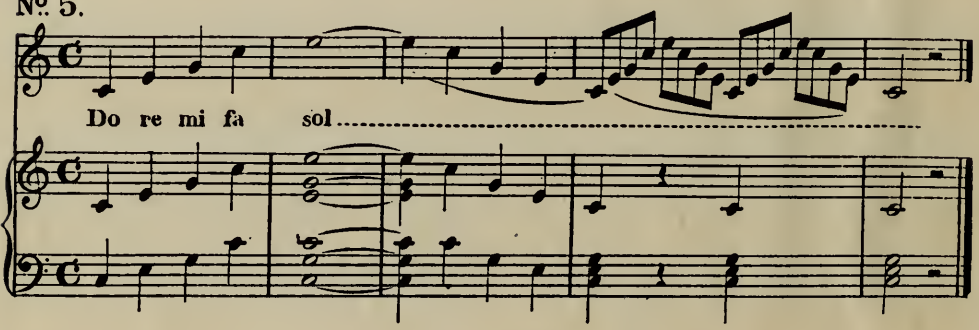


Pupil should have no action of diaphragm, in the descending passage e to c use glottis only.

№ 5.



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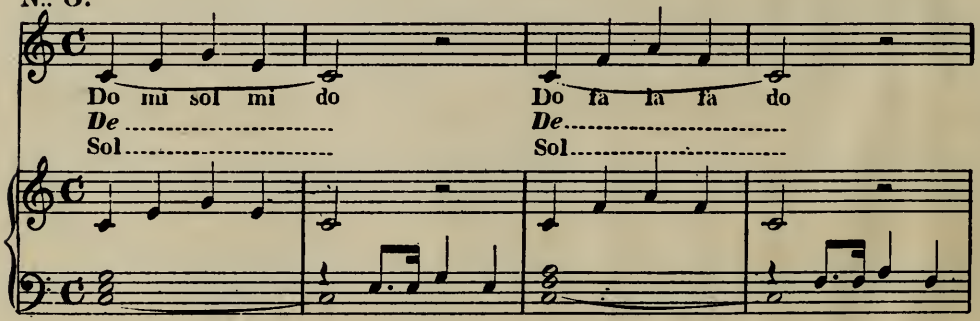
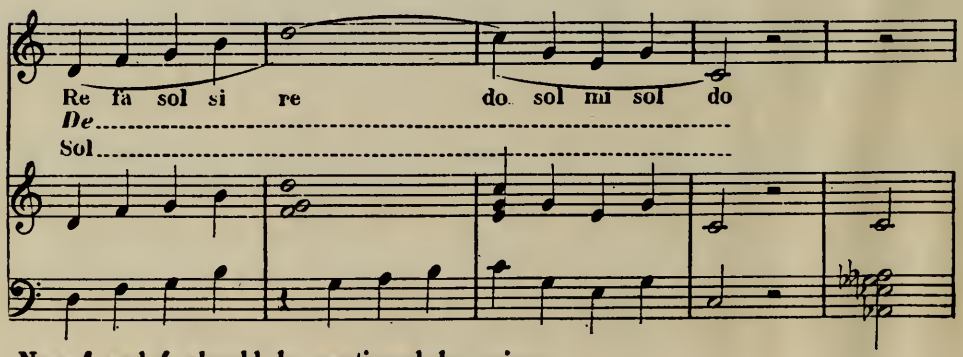
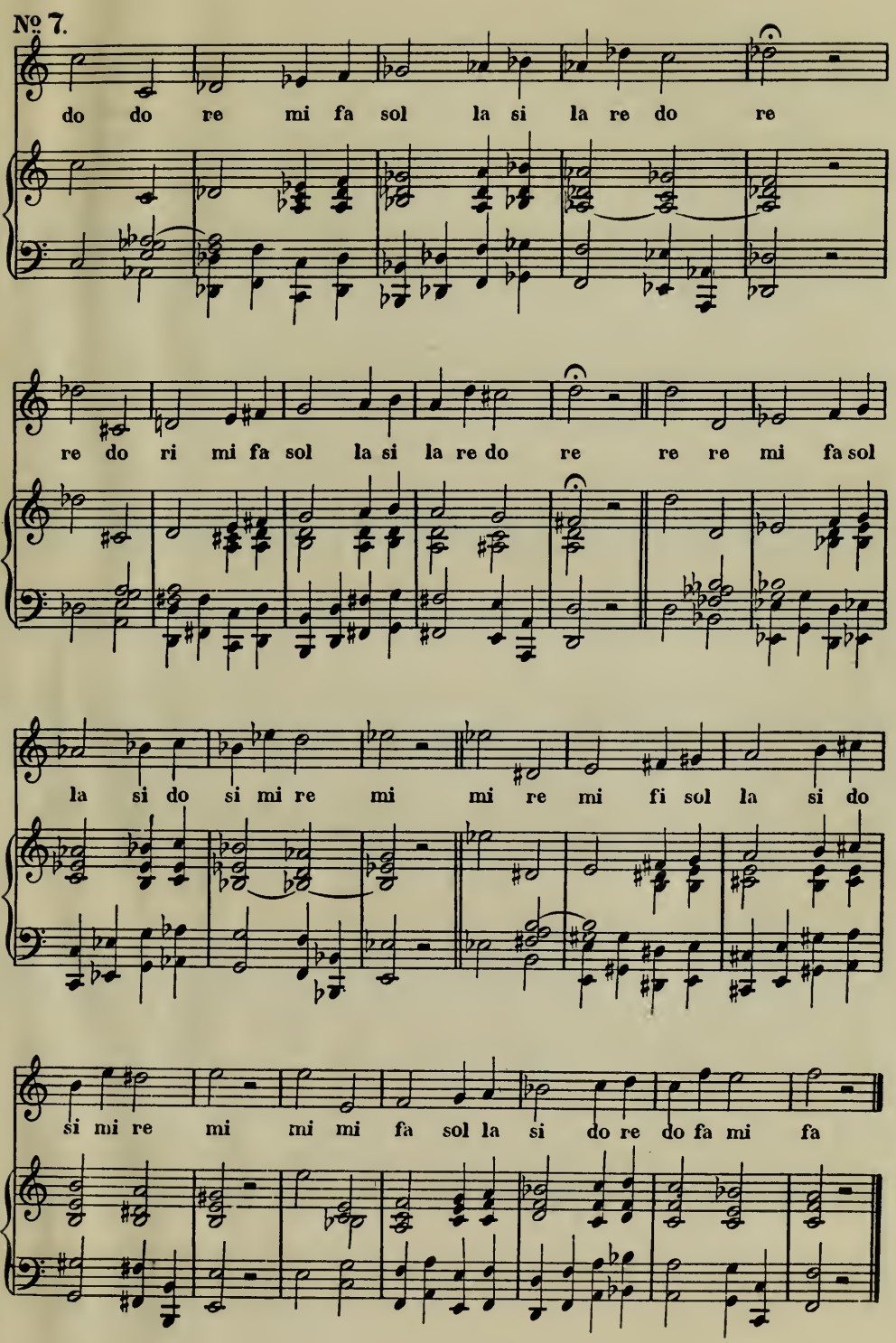
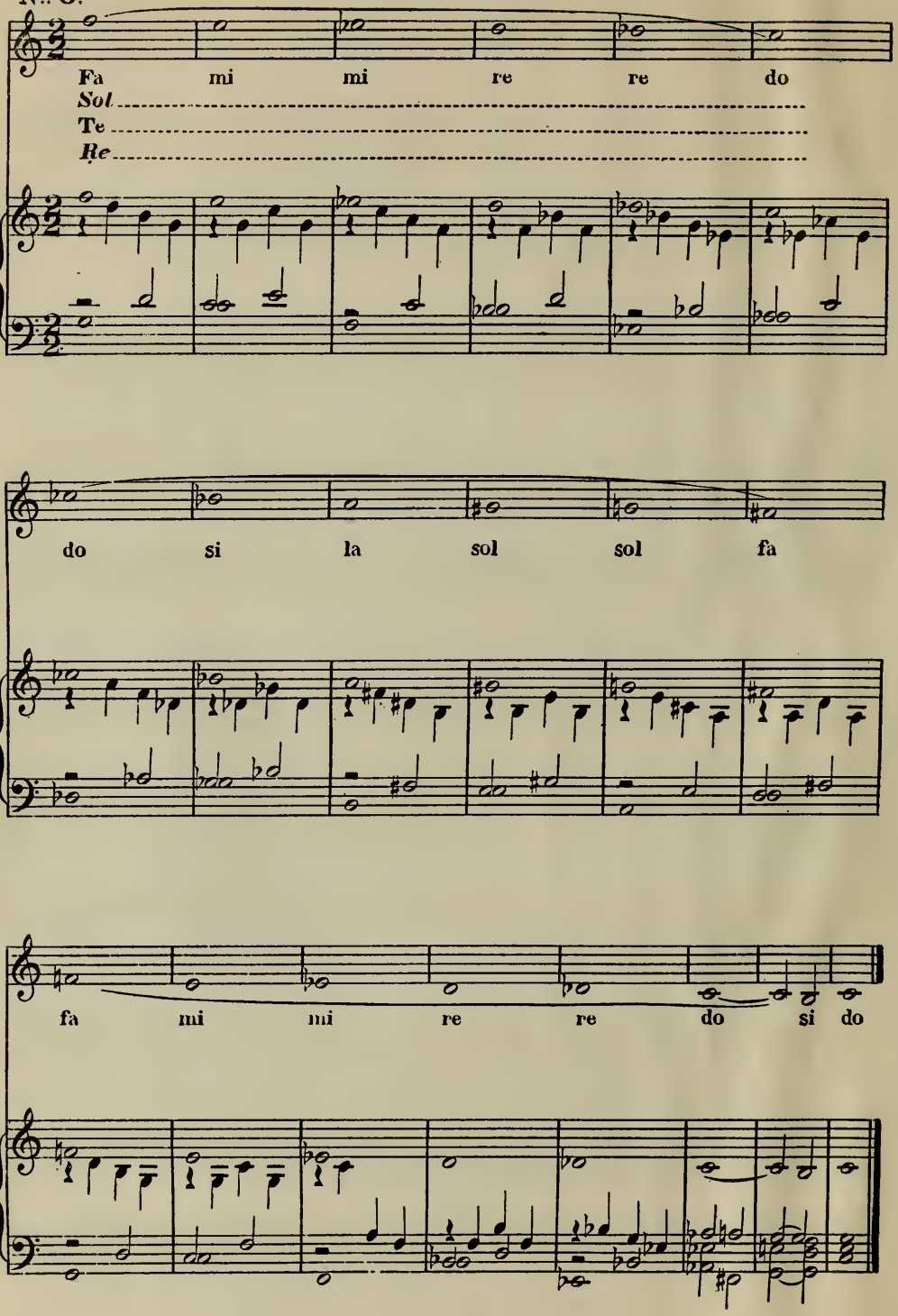


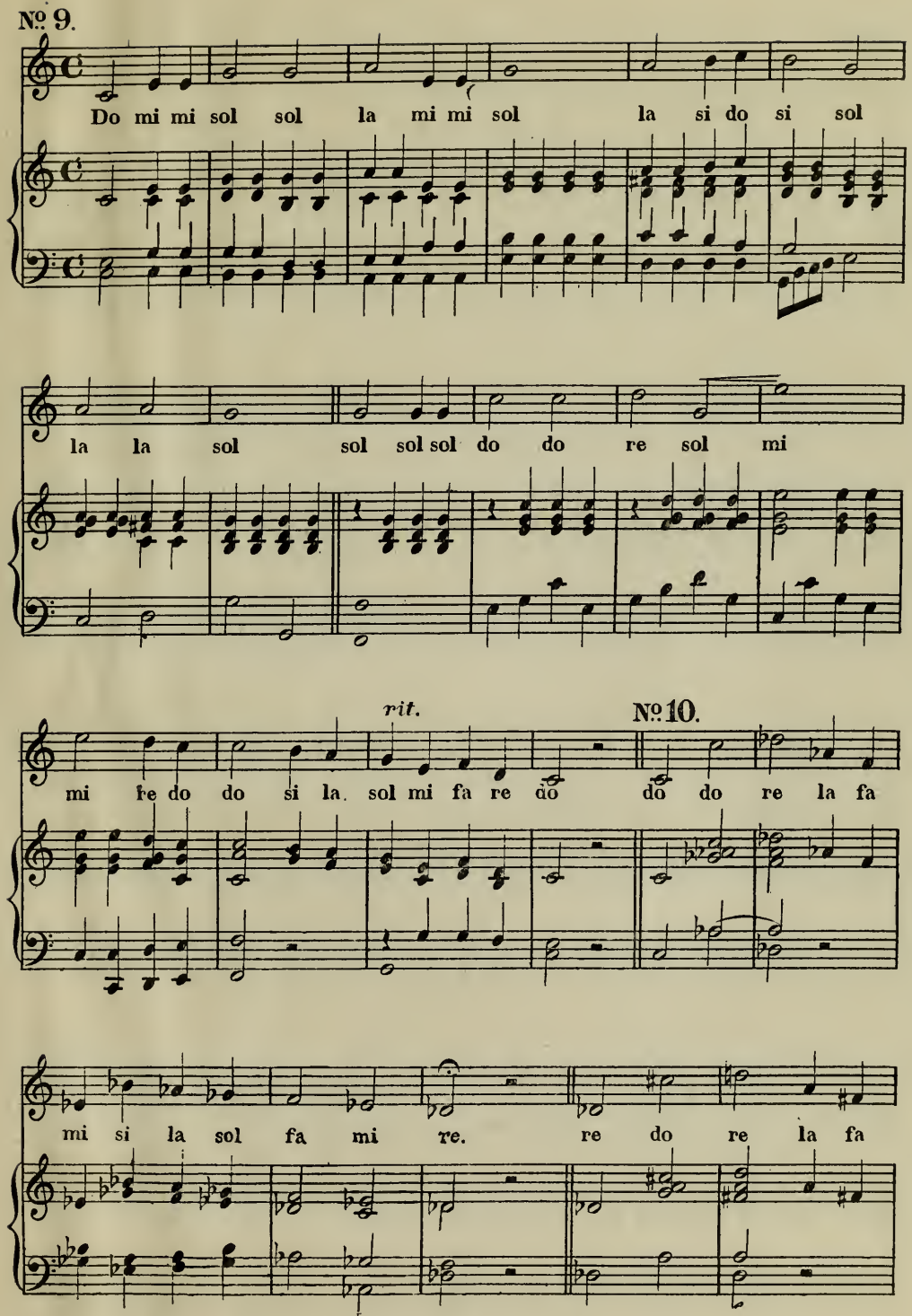


Nos. 4 and 6 should be continued by minor seconds as far as pupil can sing with ease.

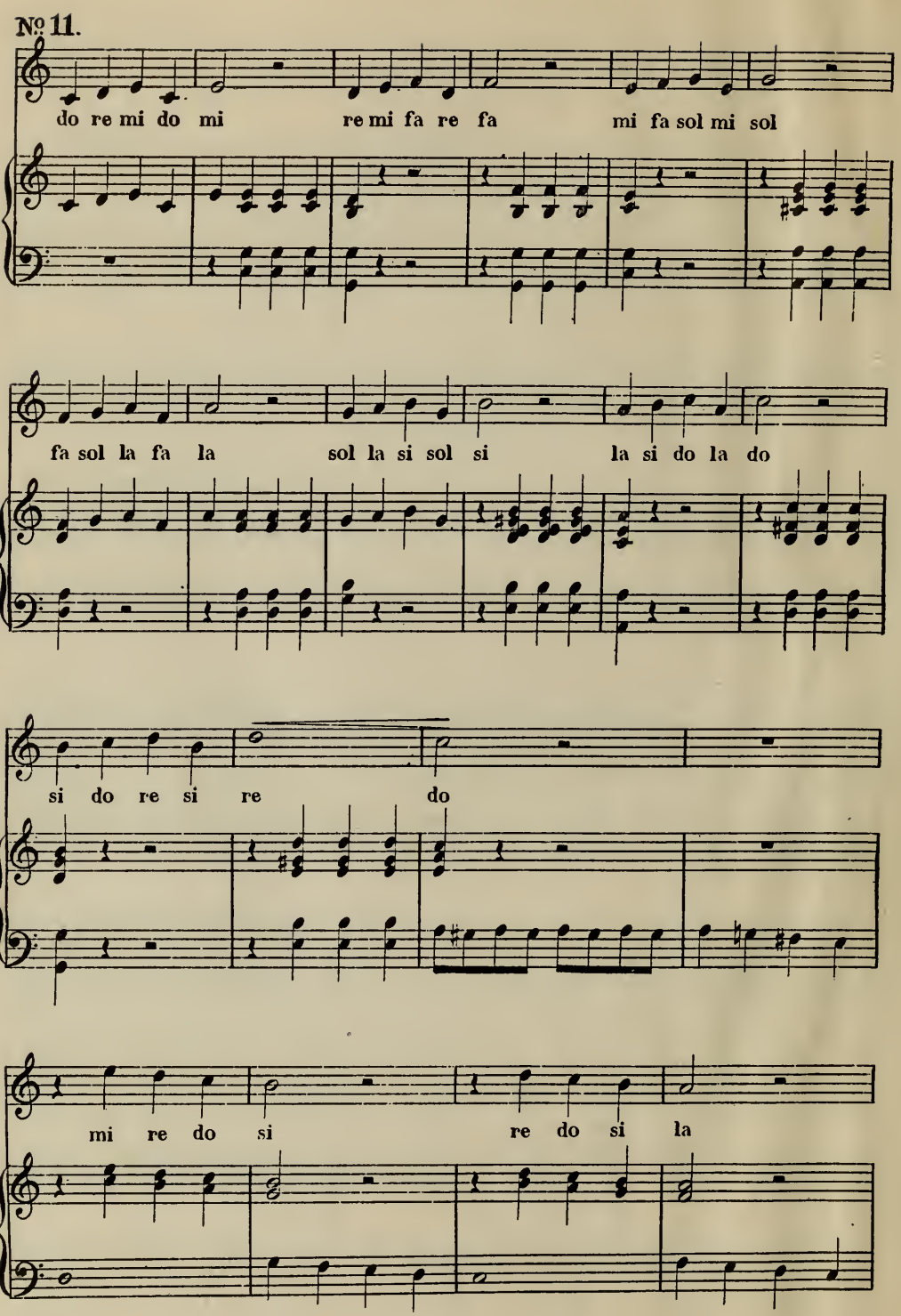

№ 7.
do do re mi fa sol la si la re do re
re do ri mi fa sol la si la re do re re re mi fa sol
la si do si mi re mi mi re mi fi sol la si do
si mi re mi mi mi fa sol la si do re do fa mi fa

No. 8. *Head voice.*





By minor seconds to f and return to No. 8.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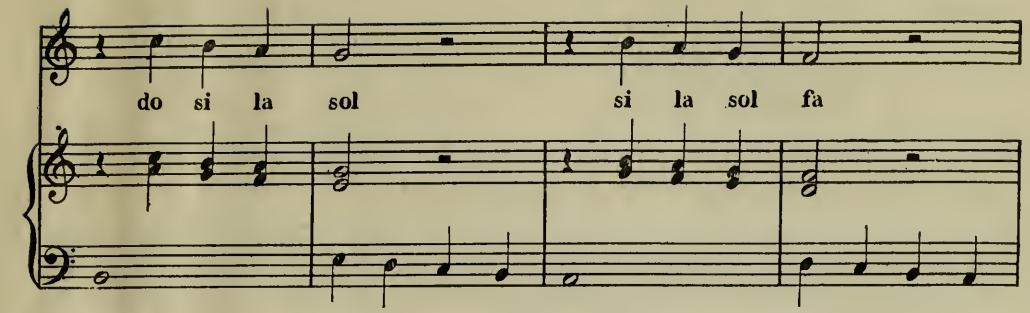
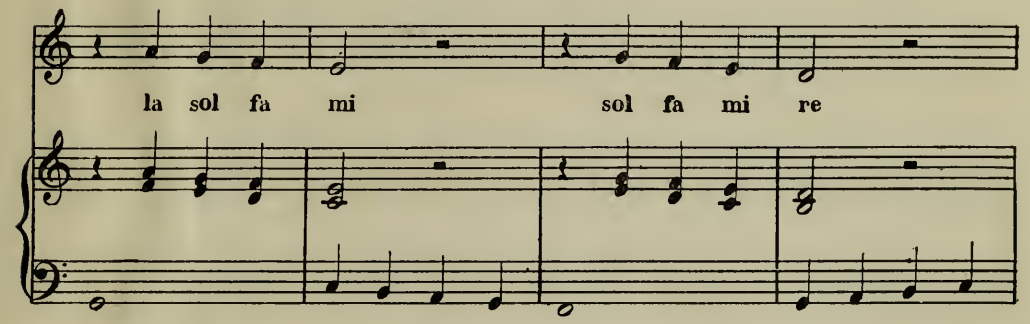
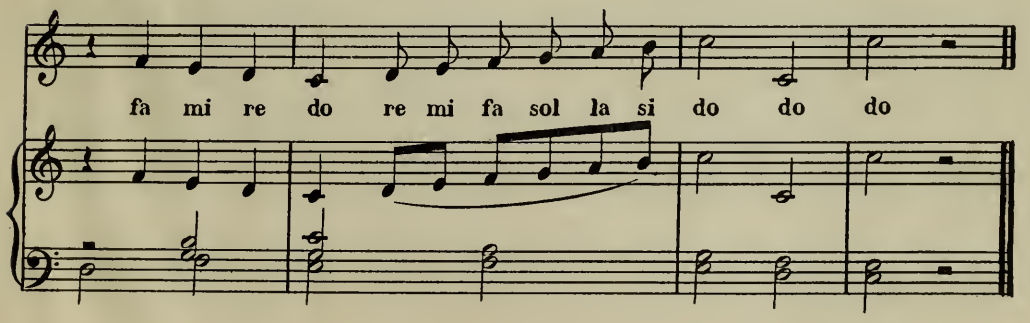
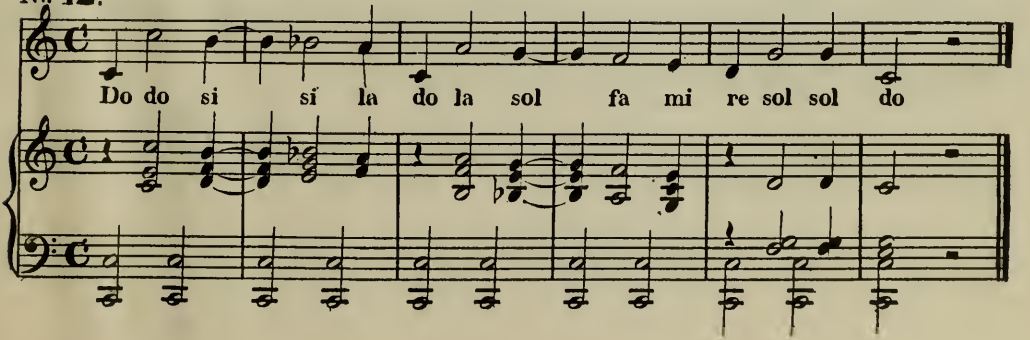
do re mi do mi re mi fa re fa mi fa sol mi sol
fa sol la fa la sol la si sol si la si do la do
si do re si re do
mi re do si re do si la


do si la sol si la sol fa

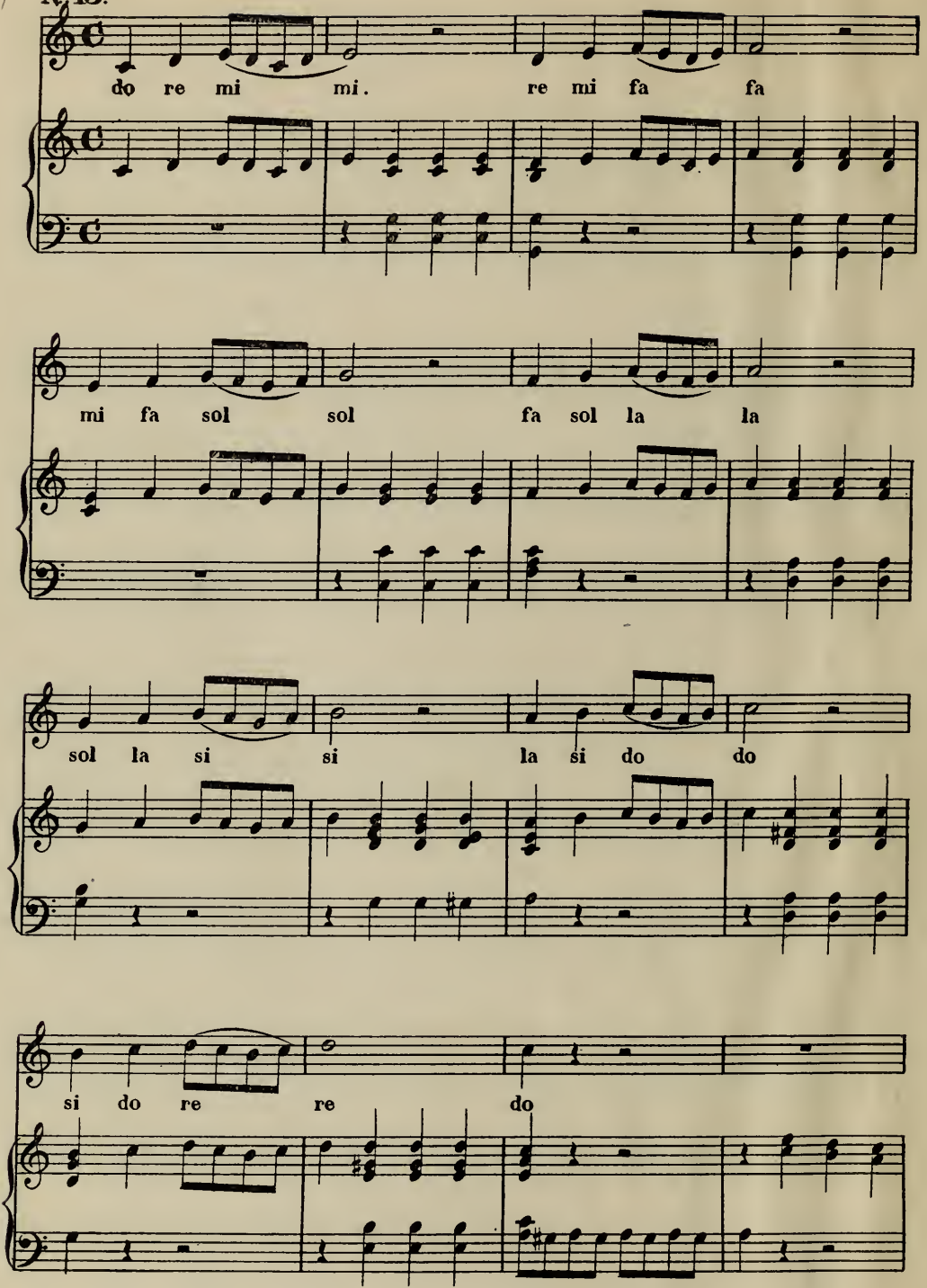

la sol fa mi sol fa mi re

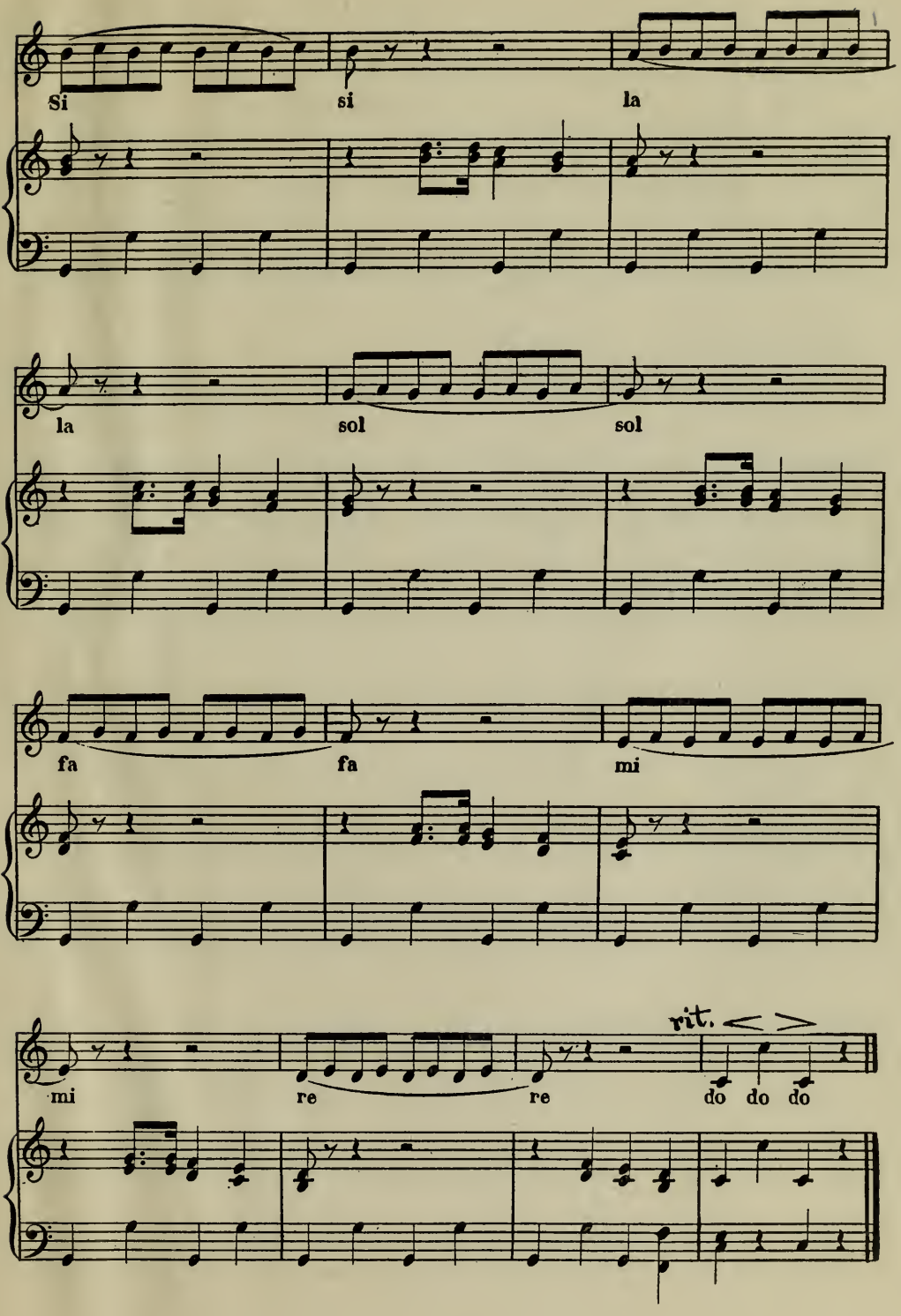

fa mi re do re mi fa sol la si do do do

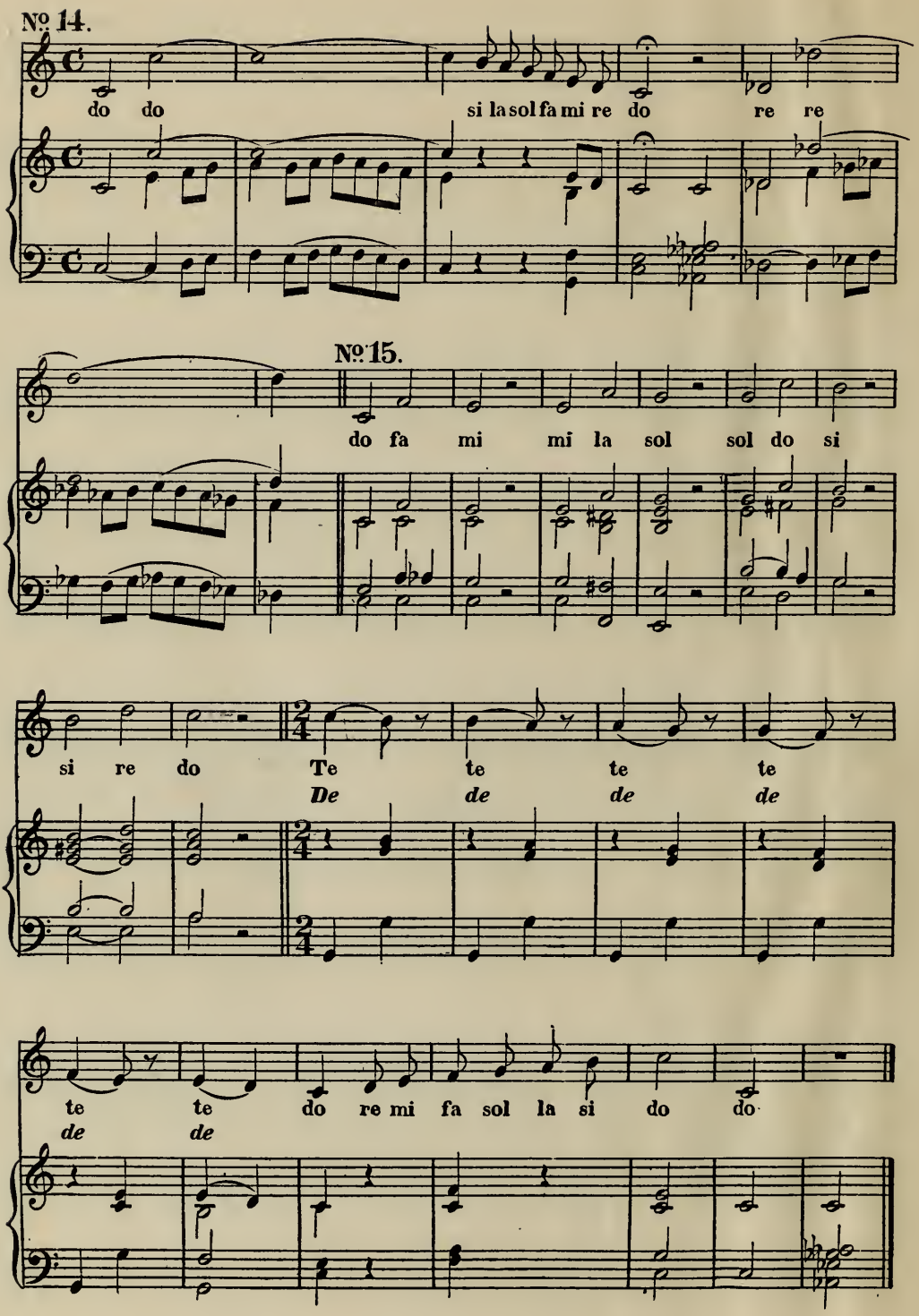
№ 12.


Do do si si la do la sol fa mi re sol sol do

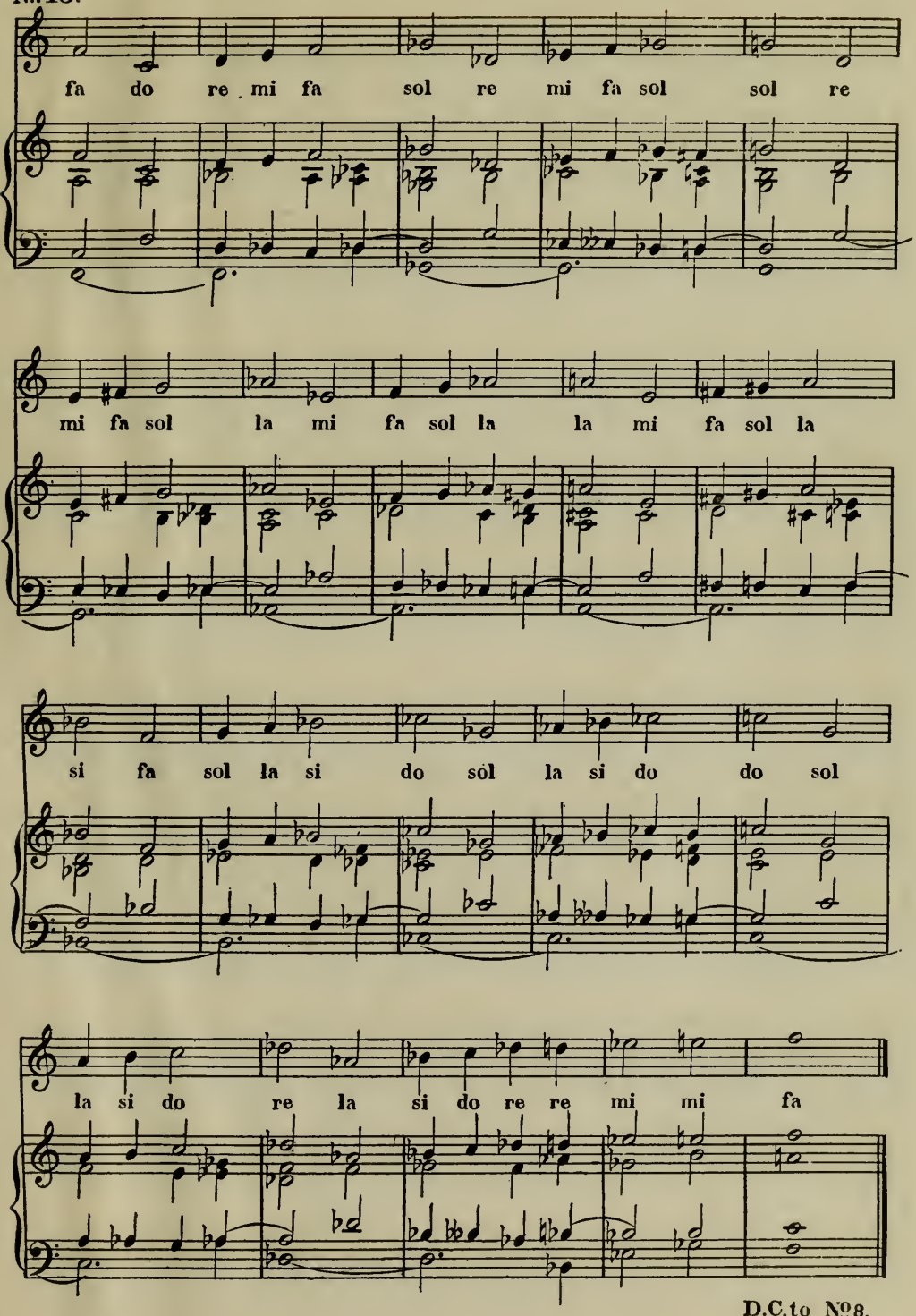
№ 13.


do re mi mi.
re mi fa fa
mi fa sol sol
fa sol la la
sol la si si
la si do do
si do re re
do


Si
si
la
la
sol
sol
fa
fa
mi
mi
re
re
rit.
do do do

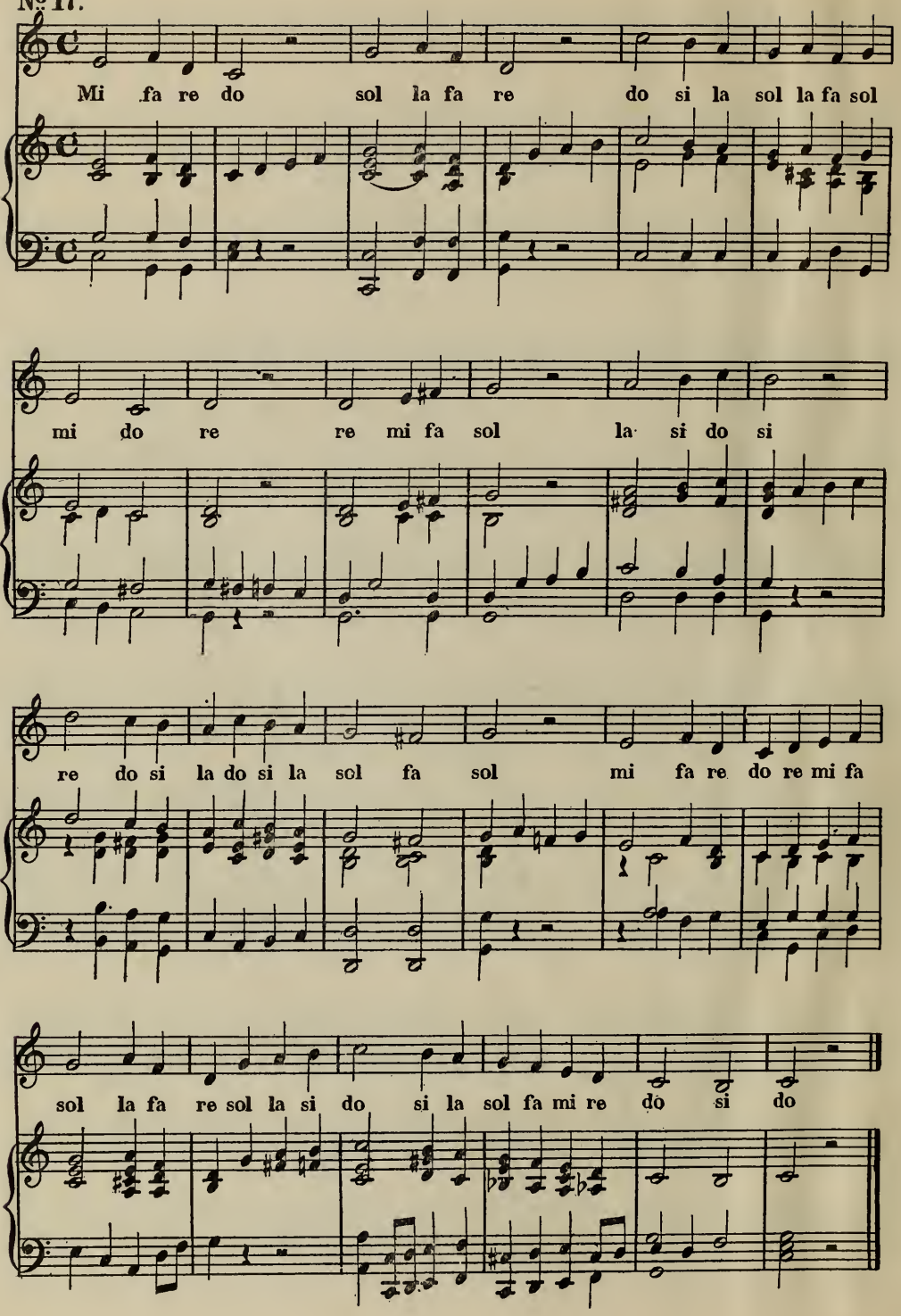

№ 14.
do do si la sol fa mi re do re re
№ 15.
do fa mi mi la sol sol do si
si re do Te te te te
De de de de
te te do re mi fa sol la si do do
de de

№ 16.

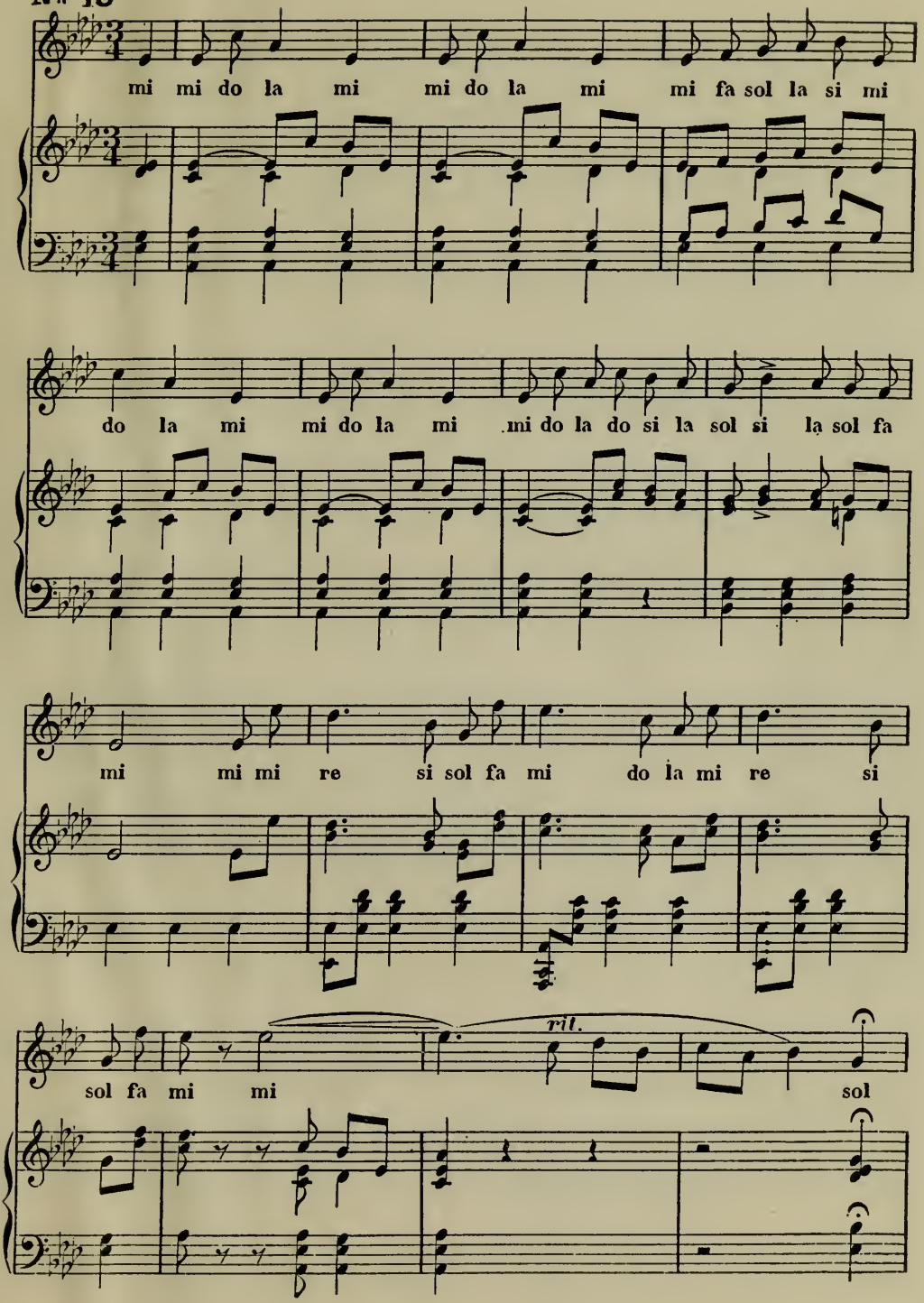

fa do re mi fa sol re mi fa sol sol re
mi fa sol la mi fa sol la la mi fa sol la
si fa sol la si do sol la si do do sol
la si do re la si do re re mi mi fa

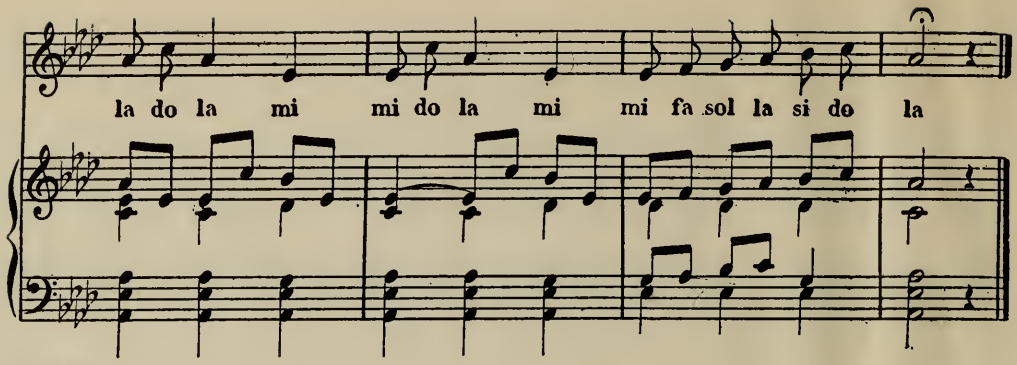
D.C. to № 8.

№ 17.

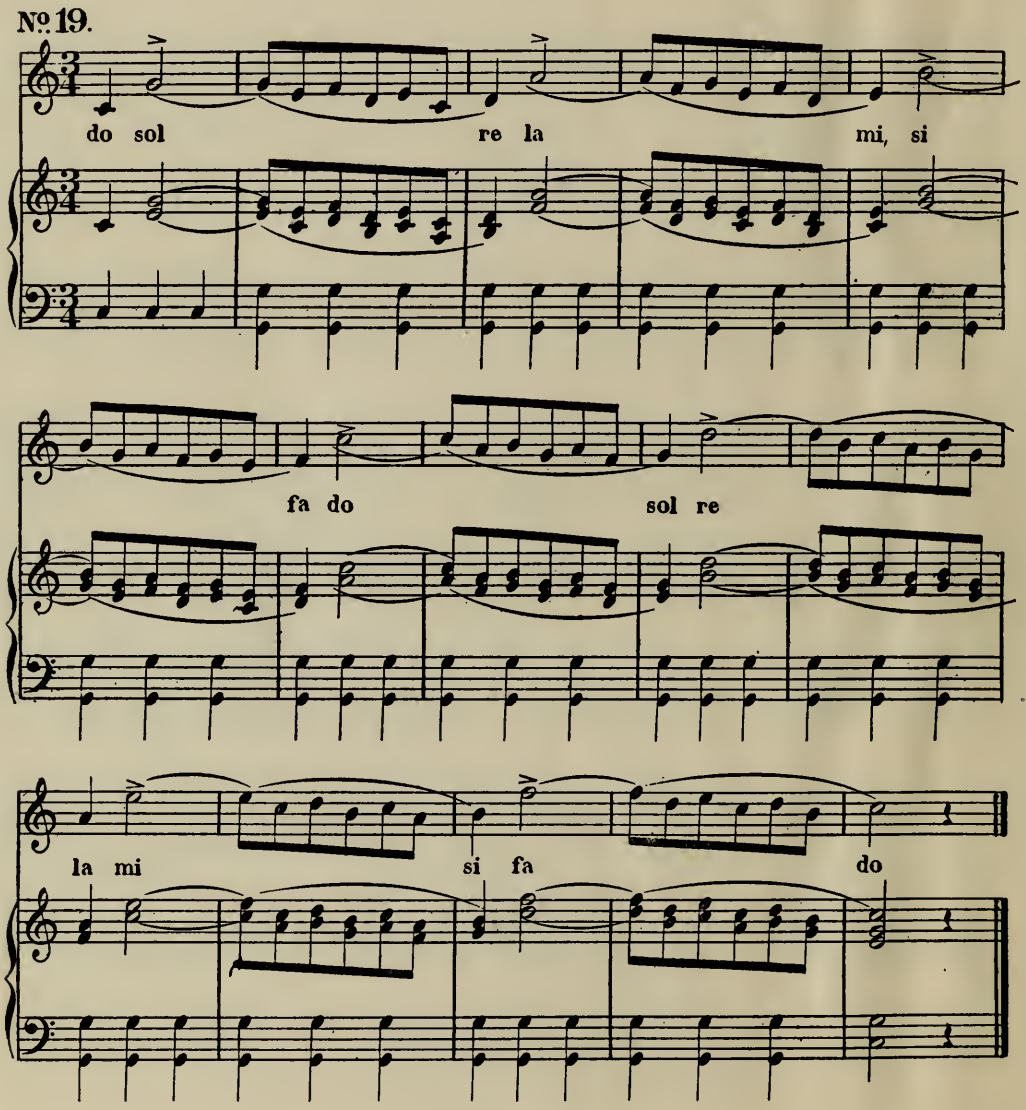

Mi fa re do sol la fa re do si la sol la fa sol
mi do re re mi fa sol la si do si
re do si la do si la sol fa sol mi fa re do re mi fa
sol la fa re sol la si do si la sol fa mi re do si do

№ 18

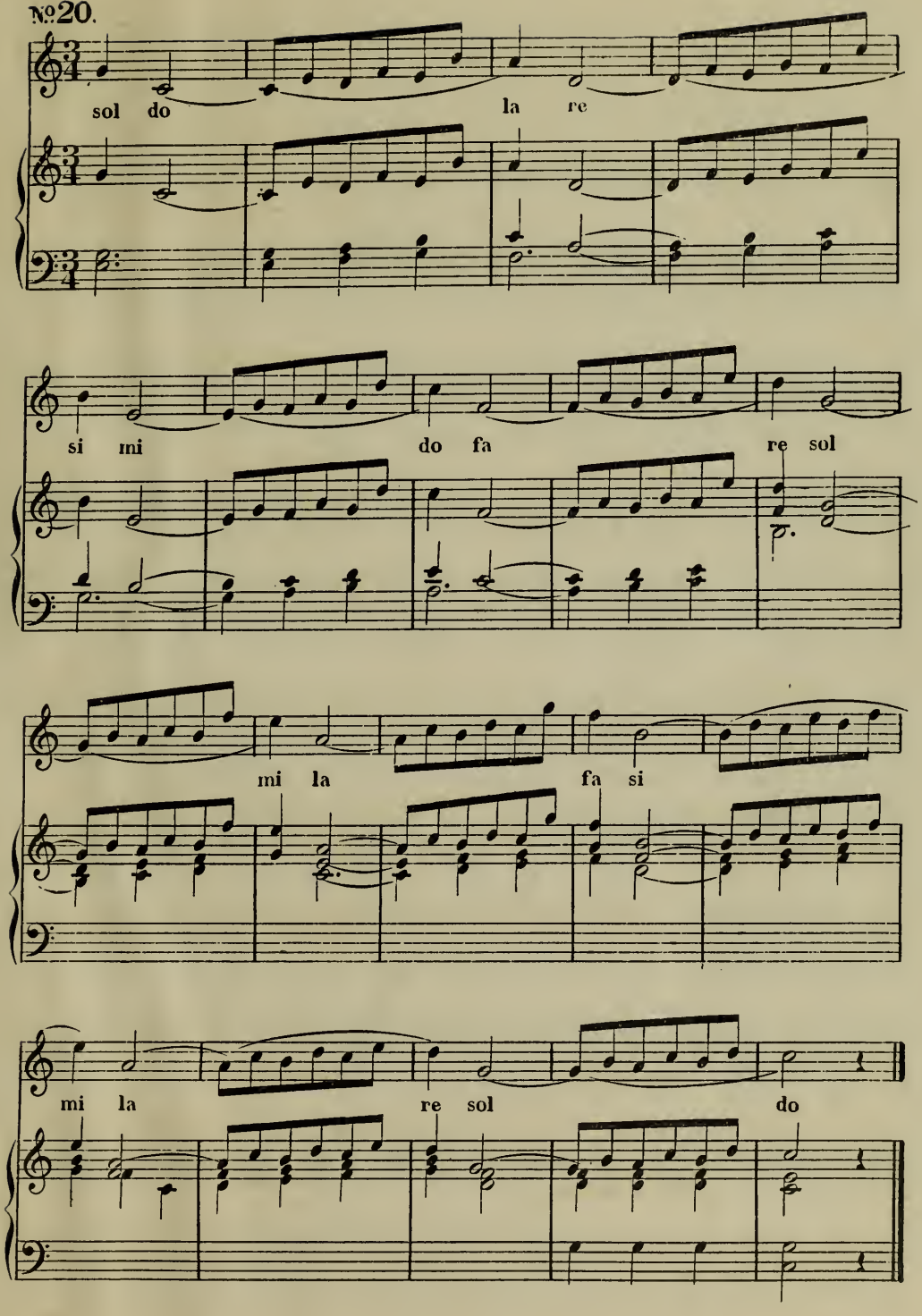

mi mi do la mi mi do la mi mi fa sol la si mi
do la mi mi do la mi mi do la do si la sol si la sol fa
mi mi mi re si sol fa mi do la mi re si
sol fa mi mi
rit.
sol


la do la mi mi do la mi mi fa sol la si do la

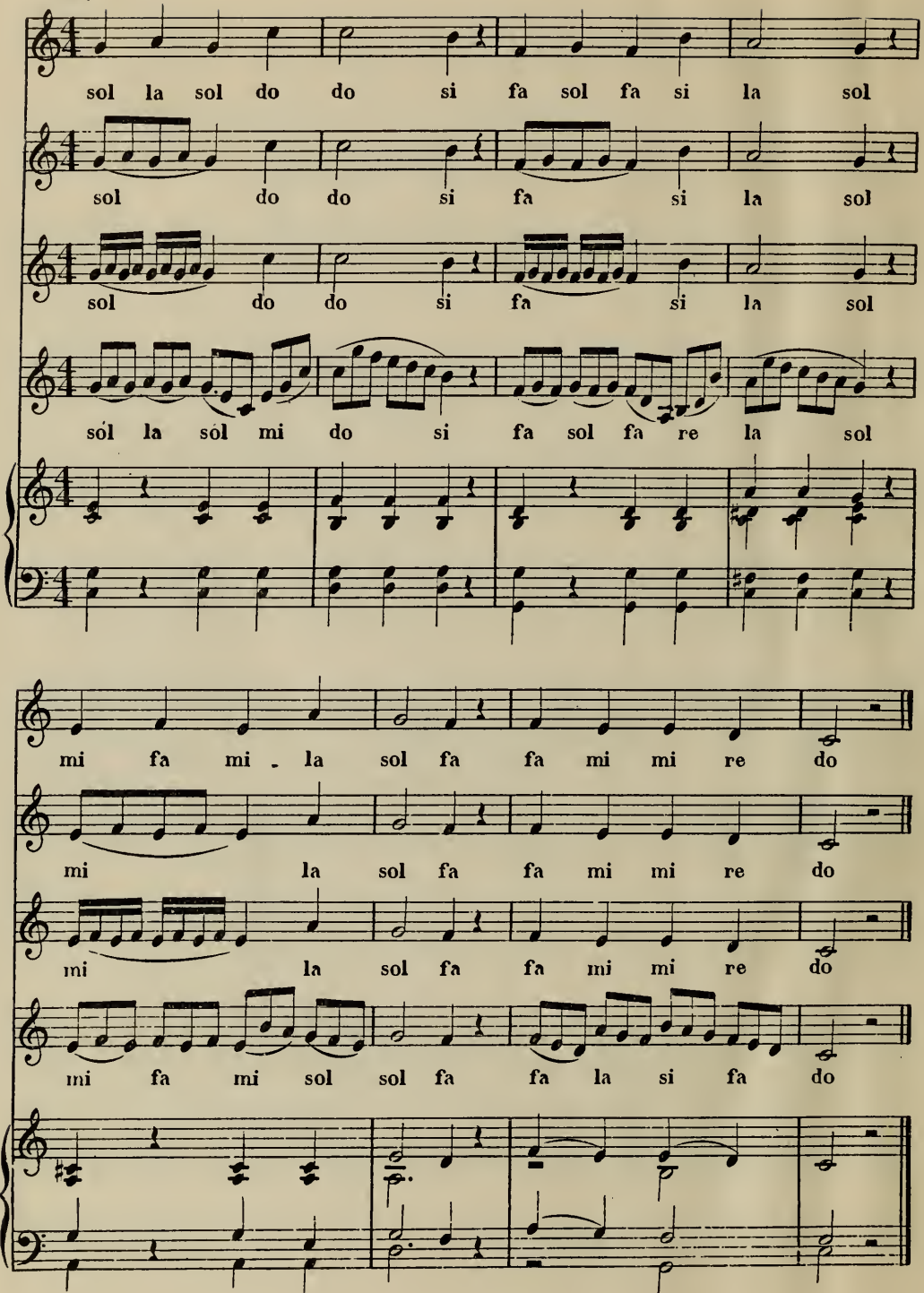
№ 19.

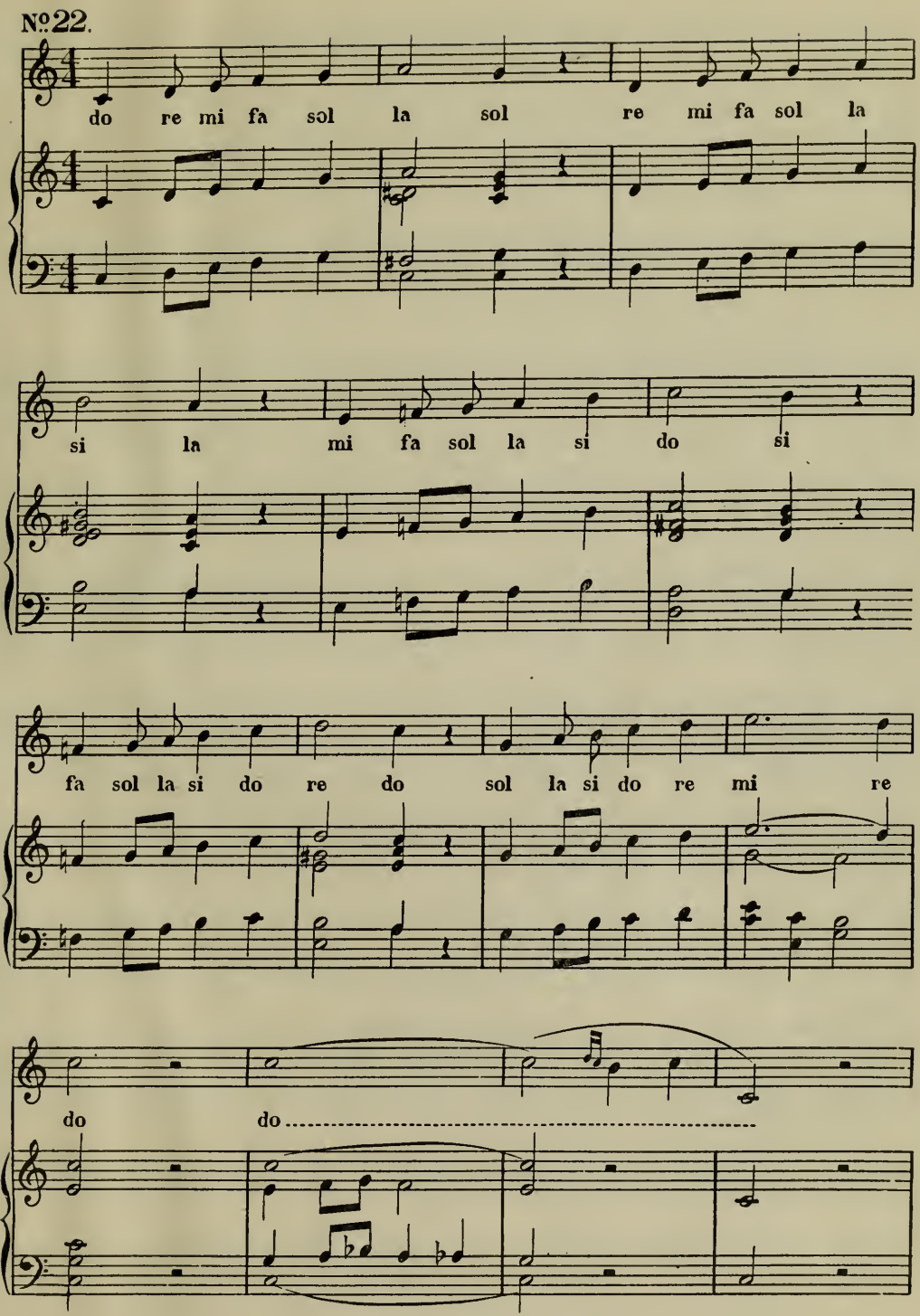

do sol re la mi, si
fa do sol re
la mi si fa do

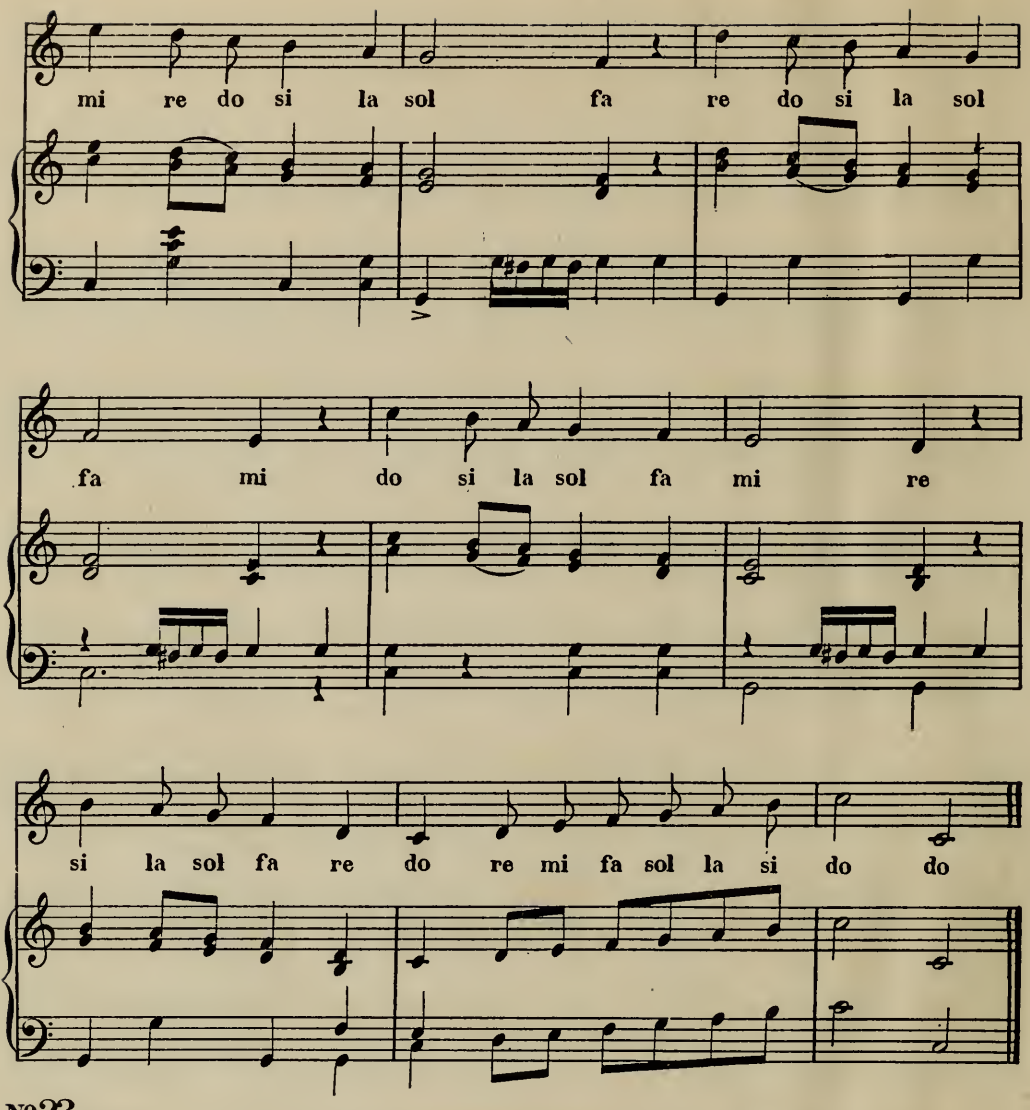
№20.



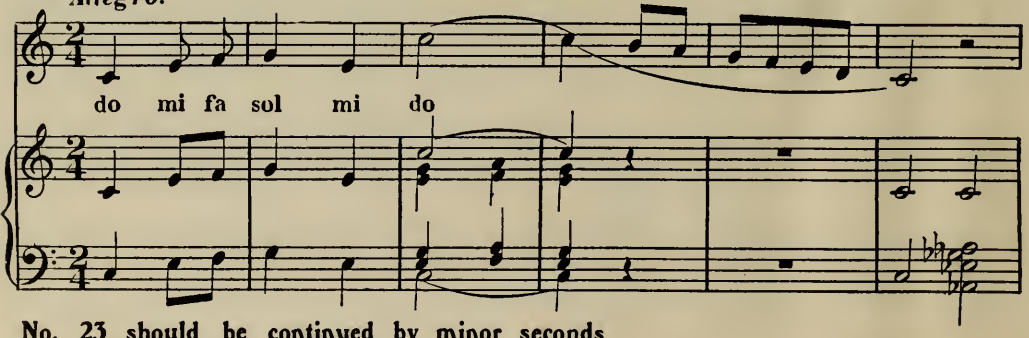
№ 21.


sol la sol do do si fa sol fa si la sol
sol do do si fa si la sol
sol do do si fa si la sol
sol la sol mi do si fa sol fa re la sol
mi fa mi - la sol fa fa mi mi re do
mi la sol fa fa mi mi re do
mi la sol fa fa mi mi re do
mi fa mi sol sol fa fa la si fa do


No. 22.
do re mi fa sol la sol re mi fa sol la
si la mi fa sol la si do si
fa sol la si do re do sol la si do re mi re
do
do

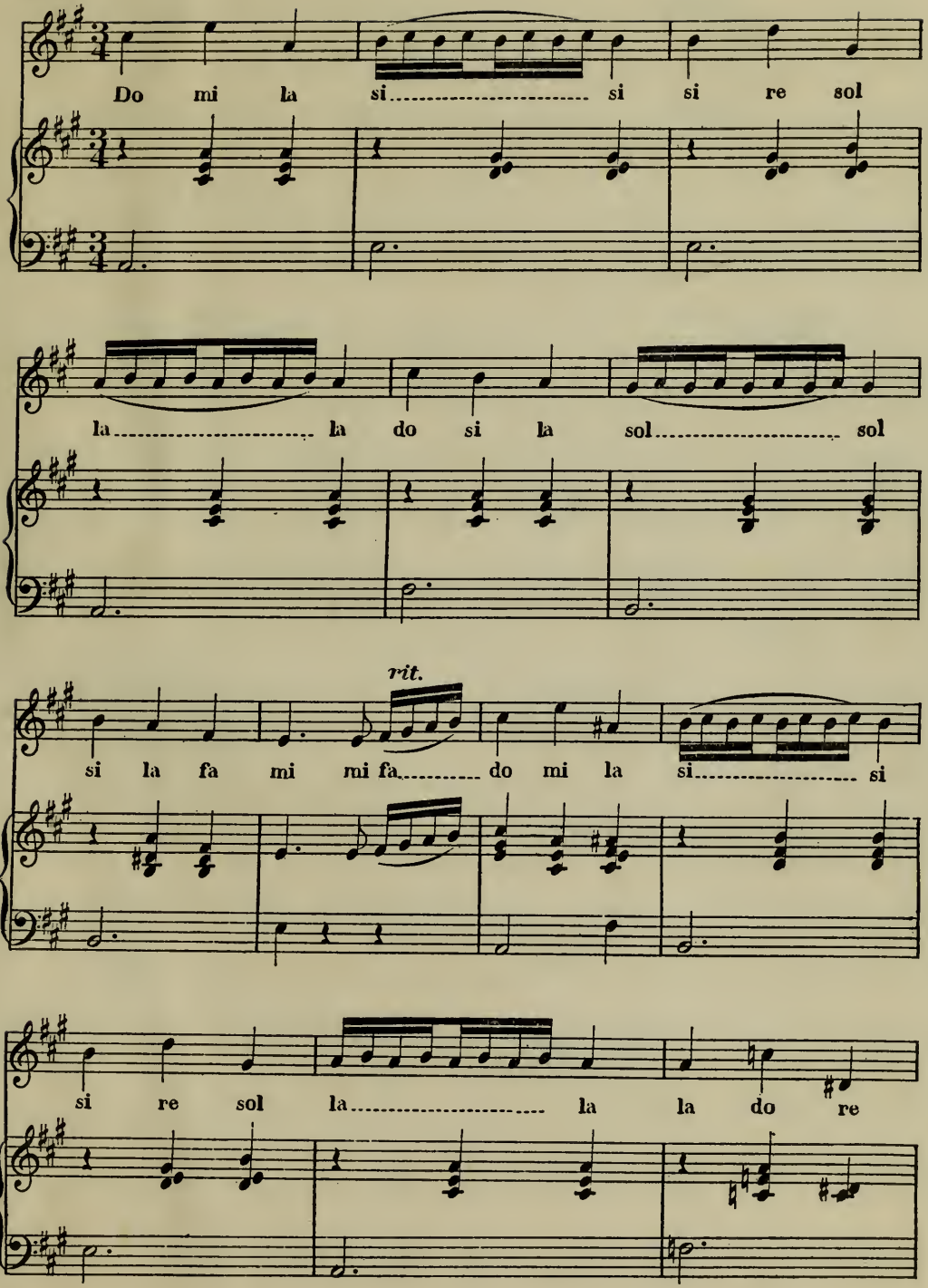


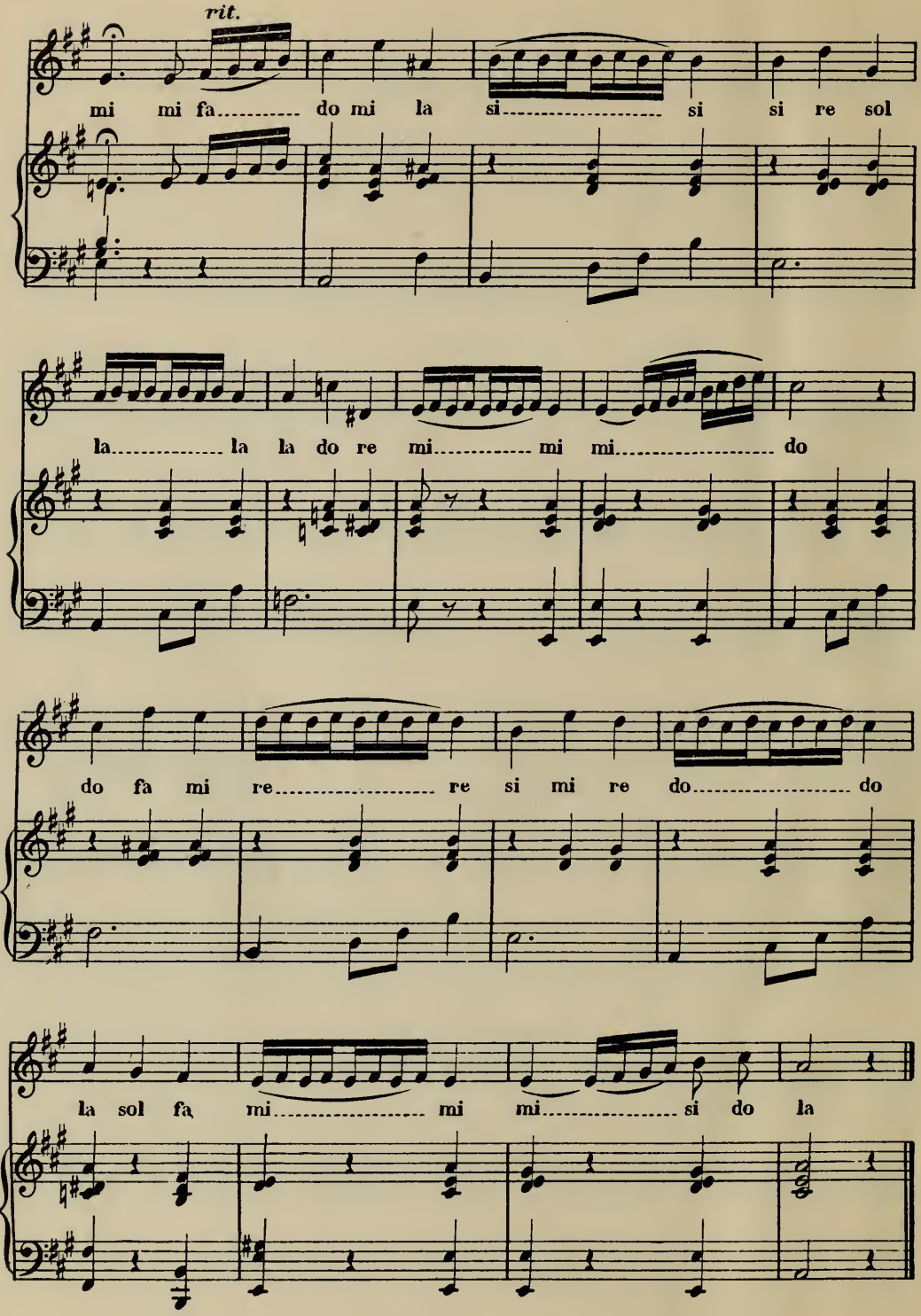
№23 *Allegro.*



No. 23 should be continued by minor seconds as far as the pupil can sing with ease.

№24.


Do mi la si si si re sol
la la do si la sol sol
rit.
si la fa mi mi fa do mi la si si
si re sol la la la do re


rit.
mi mi fa do mi la si si si re sol
la la la do re mi mi mi do
do fa mi re re si mi re do do
la sol fa mi mi mi si do la

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